

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service Santa Fe National Forest



For Immediate Release

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PRESCRIBED BURN TO BEGIN IN SANTA FE WATERSHED

(Santa Fe, NM)—“Pile burning within approximately 1,800 acres in the Santa Fe Watershed above Nichols and McClure reservoirs, will begin late January through mid-February, as weather conditions permit, announced Lawrence Garcia, Española District Fire Management Officer.

To lessen the risk of an escaped fire, Española District Fire personnel have divided the 1,800-acre treatable area into smaller 50 to 100-acre units with reinforcement fire lines around each unit. “These extra measures or mitigations allow us to remove the material on the ground that could help fuel a wildfire later on in the season,” added Garcia, “It is best to burn these units now under the right conditions.”

“The severity of this upcoming fire season has the potential to be early, very active and intense if we don’t receive moisture in January and February. “The previously thinned material that is currently on the ground poses a threat to the Watershed and to the City of Santa Fe until it is removed, said Assistant Fuels Fire Management Officer, Dave Isackson.

During ‘burning days’, Fire Managers will consider many factors including: fuel moisture levels, weather forecasts, drought conditions, resources availability, and air quality to determine whether or not to ignite. These factors are important especially now during abnormally dry times, where ongoing fire weather patterns exist. “It is important to understand the “off” and “on” nature of prescribed burning and why prescribed burning can only be accomplished when weather and fuel conditions are appropriate,” explained Fire Prevention Specialist, Claudia Standish.

Smoke from the Santa Fe Watershed Burn will be visible from the City of Santa Fe and surrounding areas. Smoke may settle into lower elevations and in drainage areas during the evenings, but should lift by mid-morning. Fire managers plan to burn during morning and early afternoon hours to mitigate smoke impacts to local communities.

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will work with Forest Service officials to monitor smoke levels to ensure that no air quality standards are exceeded during the prescribed burns. If smoke levels approach air quality standards, NMED will work with Fire Managers to limit burning and reduce smoke levels. For people with respiratory ailments, sensitivities to smoke, or are otherwise concerned about impacts to air quality from the burns, please call NMED’s Air Quality Bureau at (505) 827-1494.

The Santa Fe Watershed Project was designed to reduce dense small-diameter tree stands within a 7,270 acre area in the watershed that pose a wildfire threat to both the watershed and the city of Santa Fe. Providing 40 percent of Santa Fe’s water, the watershed is one of the main sources of water for the city Santa Fe. Since 2002 when the project began, 4,648 acres have been thinned, and 1,848 acres of piles have been burned successfully. Approximately 1,000 acres will be thinned this year, to be followed with additional prescribed burning.

For information on programs to assist homeowners reduce wildfire threat to communities, visit <http://www.firewise.org/communities> .

